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ABSTRACT

In 1970, the Office of Economic Opportunity tried to establish several voucher test sites to evaluate the voucher concept. Alum Rock Union School District, San Jose, California, was the only district in the country to agree to be a test site. In July 1973, responsibility for the Education Voucher Program was transferred to the National Institute of Education. This report provides background information about the Alum Rock project and explains the preliminary reactions to education vouchers among the parents and teachers participating in the experiment. A more detailed evaluation of the first year at Alum Rock, prepared by the Rand Corporation, will follow this report. (Author/JF)

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Education Vouchers: The Experience at Alum Rock

The National Institute of Education

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Forward

In July 1973, responsibility for the Education Voucher Program was transferred to the National Institute of Education of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare from the Office of Economic Opportunity, as part of a Presidential reorganization plan. Under terms of the transfer, NIE assumed leadership in adminstering and evaluating the voucher test site in the Alum Rock Union School District, San Jose, California, and any test sites that might be undertaken in the future.

The transfer was carried out without interruption of either program or staff, and the Alum Rock project has become an integral part of the Institute's activities. In order to assure that the education voucher program data and analysis provides useful information to policy makers across the nation, the National Council on Educational Research--NIE's policy-making body--authorized us to continue and expand the Alum Rock experiment for a second year and to begin planning for a second field test site.

Since a detailed evaluation of the first year at Alum Rock, prepared by the Rand Corporation, will be available early in 1974, this document is primarily intended to provide background information about the project. It will explain the preliminary reactions to education vouchers among the parents and teachers participating in the experiment. After reading it, I believe you will join me in looking forward to more conclusive information about this program in the future.

Thomas K. Glennan, Jr.
Director
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Introduction

In December 1969, the United States Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) commissioned a study to identify ways of making education more responsive, accountable, and effective. The study, prepared by the Center for the Study of Public Policy (CSPP), recommended that OEO field test the education voucher concept--a system under which each school age child receives a "voucher," equal to the average per student expenditure in a school district. Rather than being centrally funded, participating schools receive vouchers from enrollees and redeem them, in turn, for cash. Parents are permitted to enroll their children in the participating school of their choice. In short, a school derives its income from enrollee vouchers.

Underlying the CSPP report was an assumption that the free market theory applied to an educational system would produce beneficial results, including: greater diversity of choice among educational alternatives; greater parental satisfaction with the educational process, and increased control over the education of their children. The critics of voucher systems, however, seriously question the desirability of applying the free market theory to education. Their chief objections are that:

- Voucher systems could promote economic segregation within schools. By requiring cash payments beyond the basic voucher, schools could become accessible only to wealthy parents, resulting in socioeconomic segregation.
- The system could lead to public support of church-affiliated schools, in violation of the Constitution.
- The free market in education could lead to false claims by educators which could mislead unsophisticated parents. In short, hucksterism could affect education adversely.
- Parents--particularly low-income parents--do not have the capacity or interest to make wise educational choices for their children.
- Administering voucher systems could lead to the creation of another unwieldy bureaucracy.
- With the introducation of competition, public schools could become the schools of last resort.

The lack of empirical evidence either refuting or supporting advocates' or opponents' claims, however, suggested that careful testing and evaluation was needed in the field. In keeping with similar public regulation of the commercial marketplace, OEO and CSPP developed a "regulated compensatory voucher system" which includes the following safeguards:

- Vouchers must be the sole payment for educational services; thus, the potential for socioeconomic segregation is minimized.

- Educationally disadvantaged children receive "compensatory" vouchers (explained below), in addition to the basic voucher. This additional amount, provided by the Federal government, creates an incentive for participating schools to enroll children with compensatory vouchers. Consequently, schools would design special programs to serve these students and become more responsive to their parents.

- Meaningful choice among educational alternatives is assured by providing parents with extensive information on schools such as their educational philosophy, curriculum, faculty-student ratio, and faculty qualifications. This information is independently verified for accuracy and completeness and is broadly disseminated to parents.

- Equal access to all schools is assured by requiring non-discriminatory admissions and transfer policies. Racial discrimination, in both hiring and admission policies, is also prohibited.

In theory, private and parochial schools could participate in voucher projects; however, legal constraints--including the absence of state enabling legislation--have precluded this to date.

OEO planned to conduct the field demonstration over a five to seven year period at several sites across the country. This time period was necessary to assure operational continuity and stability, to initiate and sustain educational diversity, and to develop broad public understanding of the program. Multiple test sites will increase the probability that the conclusions drawn by the research community are generally applicable, not dependent upon peculiar characteristics of a particular site.

Experience to Date

Late in 1970, OEO sent letters to superintendents of major school districts throughout the country. These letters briefly explained the proposed test of the "regulated compensatory voucher system" and asked that interested school districts contact OEO for further information.

School districts could apply to the agency for a grant to explore the desirability and feasibility of participating in a voucher demonstration. During the feasibility study, school boards, with involvement of state officials, would select an advisory committee, representing a cross-section of school and community interests, to investigate and react to such a system. In addition, the committee would tailor voucher policies and procedures to the needs of its specific community. At the completion of the feasibility study, the school board would review the model with advice from the committee, consider the information received from community attitude and opinion surveys, and decide whether or not to apply for a planning grant.

Several school districts--Gary, Indiana; Seattle, Washington; San Francisco, California; Alum Rock Union Elementary, San Jose, California; New Rochelle and Rochester, New York--applied for and received feasibility grants. In four of the districts, the school board decided not to implement the voucher project. Objections were similar in most districts: Vouchers existed only as a theoretical concept, not as a program which could be viewed objectively. Already burdened by massive problems, the large urban school districts were unwilling to risk the experiment. In the absence of a functioning voucher system, they felt that their specific questions could not be answered factually.

Moreover, discussions about vouchers became inextricably interwoven with local politics. Several sites had difficulties resolving problems of racial isolation within their public schools, and felt that the effects of greater parental choice on school enrollment could not be predicted accurately. In addition, both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers opposed the implementation of a voucher test site, and in all sites--except Alum Rock--local teachers' organizations also opposed participation in the test.

The inclusion of non-public schools in the voucher demonstration required passage of special state enabling legislation. In most states, the inclusion of such schools would lead to legal challenges. Debate over the church-state issue frequently dominated the dialogue on the

voucher concept. In sum, the range of community differences generally associated with large scale social change were present in each feasibility site, and only Alum Rock decided to proceed with the test.

Alum Rock Demographic and Financial Data

The Alum Rock Union School District serves the student population of the eastern portion of San Jose, California. Known locally as the "east valley," the area has rapidly urbanized during the past 15 years. Even now, some sections of the district are making the complex transition from agricultural to residential and commercial land use. Fruit orchards are quickly being replaced by low- and moderate-income housing developments and garden apartment complexes. There remains little distinction between downtown and residential areas; retail stores and shopping centers are distributed throughout residential neighborhoods. Although half the district's children are considered poor by both Federal and state standards, poor families are not concentrated in particular areas. In fact, San Jose is the most fully integrated Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area in the nation.

The Alum Rock Union School District is administered by a five-member elected school board, serving staggered four year terms. Board membership mirrors the community's cultural and racial diversity, including : one Chicano; one Japanese-American; one black, and a male and female white. The board has independent taxing authority and appoints the superintendent.

In 1969-70, Alum Rock received one-third more state aid per pupil than California's average student aid. Only 30 of California's 723 elementary school districts had a higher total tax rate; the state median assessed valuation per elementary pupil was $19,600 and Alum Rock's was $5,328. According to its superintendent, Alum Rock is the "poorest" large district in Northern California, and one of the poorest large elementary districts in the entire state. Its student population usually has fluctuated between 15,000 and 16,000 students in grades kindergarten - eight. The current student population is about 50% Spanish-surnamed, 12% black, and 38% white and other.

Alum Rock's operating budget increased from slightly under $11 million in 1969-70, to $13 million in 1971-72, and to $16 million in 1972-73. For the 1973-74 school year, the budget is over $18 million. This increase is largely due to new state aid programs.

Alum Rock Statistics

	1970-71	1971-72	1972-73	(Estimated) 1973-74
Number of Students	15,785	16,068	15,428	15,425
General Expenditures	$11,537,868	$13,058,419	$15,672,282	$18,552,470
Average ADA Pupil Costs	$ 713	$ 821	$1,016	$1,203
Tax Rate	$ 4.66	$ 4.82	$ 5.21	$ 4.30
Assessed Valuation per ADA (Pupil)	$5,328	$4,921	$7,029	$7,606

More than half the students in Alum Rock schools participate in federally funded free or reduced price lunch programs, and according to the 1970 Census, 36% of district families receive public assistance. The population of Alum Rock is relatively mobile; consequently, pupil turnover runs as high as 30% a year.

The Voucher Project at Alum Rock

After carefully exploring the theoretical model, Alum Rock applied to OEO for a feasibility grant in February 1971. The superintendent and school board had begun to decentralize some activities of the school district, and saw the voucher project as a means of achieving this objective rapidly. The voucher plan initially studied by Alum Rock included non-public schools, but the California legislature did not pass the necessary enabling legislation. Despite this set-back, interest in the voucher demonstration continued.

Community reaction to the plan based on survey feedback was generally positive. The superintendent recognized that one source of resistence to the experiment among teachers and staff was their unfamiliarity with the staff role change which would accompany decentralization in a voucher operation. To explore this issue thoroughly, the superintendent retained

organizational development and management training consultants to assist potential participants in assessing the personal and professional implications of a voucher project. This effort generated substantial support for a "modified voucher model," which would act as a transition between traditional school structures and the regulated compensatory voucher system. Alum Rock ultimately requested funds for a public school voucher program in the 1972-73 academic year, covering six public schools and 3,900 children in grades kindergarten through eight. While including the essential features of the voucher concept, the demonstration operated within the constraints of the existing education code and the California Constitution.

In short, the transition model was designed to encourage an adequate range of different public education programs from which parents can choose. OEO required each of the six schools to offer at least two distinct educational programs, or "mini-schools." Each "mini-school" operates autonomously, with its own income-outgo budget, curriculum, educational philosophy and staff. Parents are able to enroll children in any "mini-school" in any participating school building.

Principals and faculty members agreed that program differentiation within a school provided an environment in which administrators and teachers alike could maximize their professional capabilities, and in many cases, this increased communications between faculty and parents. In turn, these dialogues led to academic programs which reflected parents' wishes and teachers' professional interests. By May 1972, twenty-two "mini-schools" housed in the six buildings were offered. These programs can be categorized broadly as follows: Traditional Academic--each school developed at least one traditional "mini-school" in response to parents' insistence on educational continuity Innovative or Open Classrooms; Gifted; Fine and Creative Arts; Learning-by Doing; Individualized Learning, and Multi-Cultural. Each "mini-school" was required to prepare information about its program offering, educational philosophy, student-teacher ratio and extent of parent participation. This information was verified and distributed to participating parents before their enrollment selections were made.

An independent and representative group drawn from the demonstration area, the Education Voucher Advisory Committee (EVAC), advised the school board on matters affecting the demonstration. Groups of parents or others wishing to initiate programs not available within demonstration schools were permitted to develop programs responsible to the school board through individual contracts which would operate under the rules governing other voucher schools.

In its dealings with the Alum Rock school board, the OEO staff required that the following additional elements should be taken into consideration in future planning.

- If the demonstration was received positively by the community, it would be expanded to include between 8,000 and 10,000 students in the second year.
- If enabling legislation were passed, the board would determine the desirability of moving to a full voucher program.
- If the project was expanded in the second year, funding would be continued for at least five years, with one year advance funding.

In March 1973, after seven months of operation, Alum Rock proposed a major expansion for the 1973-74 academic year, adding approximately 5,000 students in seven additional schools. During the Spring 1973 enrollment period for school attendance in the coming Fall, parents could choose among more than forty "mini-school" programs in thirteen public school buildings.

Three important features of both the transition and full voucher models should be mentioned here--compensatory vouchers, lottery placement, and optional purchase of central services.

In keeping with the consensus of the education community and with strong precedent (Title I, ESEA, etc.) a "compensatory voucher" is given to eligible children to be used at the discretion of the "mini-school" faculties. This attempts to equalize the schools' responsiveness to parents by providing extra funds to programs that attract economically disadvantaged students. In 1973-74, this voucher will amount to $275; the 1972-73 value was $238 for K-6 children and $302 for children in grades 7-8.

District policy guarantees children who are attending a particiular building, and their younger siblings, the right to continue attending that building. If a building is overapplied, a lottery mechanism assures all other children an equal chance for admission.

Certain central services (psychologists, audio-visual services, and curriculum support services) are now "decentralized." Previously, the district office provided these services centrally to all district schools. Now, voucher schools receive these funds for their individual use. This procedure increases each program manager's freedom to expend income as he deems appropriate.

The Federal financial support provided, by year of expenditure, is displayed below:

	FY'72-73	FY'73-74	FY'74-75	Total
Compensatory Vouchers	$ 509,100	$1,282,450	$1,282,450	$3,074,000
Total Voucher Funds	$1,585,756	$2,924,868	$2,370,686	$6,881,310
Number of Students	3,900	9,000	9,000	
Number of Schools	6	13	13	

Research and Analysis to Date

The voucher demonstration is producing extensive changes in school organization, management, and the traditional relationships among staff, faculty, and parents. These and other factors have led to an exploratory and experimental approach to the analysis of project data.

It is important to emphasize that the changes in Alum Rock during the 1972-73 school year do not constitute an adequate basis for conclusions about the effectiveness of the voucher concept in general. The initial year, for both the school district and the Federal government, has been primarily developmental, and full understanding of the voucher system is not expected until well into the program period.

Evaluation activities in Alum Rock began in Spring 1972 shortly after the Board of Education submitted its first year proposal to OEO. Since then data collection instruments have been designed and field tested, baseline data on students, parents and teachers have been collected, observations of the schools and the community have been made, and with the close of the first year of the demonstration, preliminary analyses have begun.

A comprehensive report of the first year of the voucher project in Alum Rock will be published early in 1974. This work will describe the events that shaped the demonstration during the start-up phase, report on parental and staff attitudes at the beginning of

the demonstration and changes that occurred during the year, discuss parents' use of vouchers, and describe the behavior of the first school system in the nation attempting to implement a regulated compensatory voucher program.

Parental Choice

Parental control and satisfaction are difficult to measure. However, when a parent transfers a child from one educational program to another, some sort of choice has been made. The voucher mechanism facilitated that choice, and thus, the transfer of children from one participating school to another is a clear index of parental exercise of control.

In Alum Rock, transfers were permitted at any time during the school year, and without limit. During the first year of the demonstration, about 220 families of the 2,650 participating families transferred children. These transfers were in the following categories:

- 101 families enrolled children in different buildings than they had previously been attending.
- 27 families changed building during the school year.
- 95 families changed program within a building during the school year.

Over 40% of the families with two or more children in voucher schools chose different programs for different offspring, implying a desire to match program styles to children's needs.

During the project's second year, the number of transfers is expected to increase significantly. The Spring 1973 enrollment cycle for the 1973-74 school year showed that:

- Among the original six voucher schools, 38% of the children transferred for the coming year, 30% changed from one program to another within the same school building, while 8% changed from one building to another.
- Among the new voucher schools, 17% of the students changed from the school building they were attending in school year 1972-73, to another participating voucher school for the coming school year.

Changes in Parental Attitudes

Voucher parents were surveyed in Fall 1972 and again in June 1973. A brief description of the differences in their responses follows. Perhaps the most significant increases between the surveys occurred in the percentage of participating parents agreeing with the following attitudinal statements:

- Most parents like the idea that they should have a choice about the kinds of schools their children attend. (Fall, 83%; Spring, 95%)

- Children will get a better education if their parents can select the school that they go to. (Fall, 57%; Spring, 75%)

- Giving parents a choice about the schools their children attend will make teachers more responsive to their complaints and suggestions. (Fall, 66%; Spring, 76%)

Thus, it appears that, after a year's experience, parents more fully understand the role of parental choice in a voucher system. Furthermore, compared to the Fall, more parents believed that they should help decide on the hiring and firing of teachers (Fall, 36%; Spring, 53%) and principals (Fall, 52%; Spring, 69%).

- Compared to the Fall, more parents surveyed in the Spring believed that the voucher system will provide the means for greater control over their children's education. (Fall, 53%; Spring, 69%) They also believed that vouchers will improve the quality of the education their children receive. (Fall, 77%; Spring, 89%)

- In the Spring survey, more parents believed that teachers and principals took their suggestions and complaints seriously.

- In both Fall 1972 and Spring 1973, parents in Alum Rock were 20% more satisfied with their schools than a national sample of parents.

- In Spring 1973, almost one quarter of the parents believed that the number of program offerings by the school administration of Alum Rock was insufficient.

> The perceived benefits of the voucher system increased across the board. This is to say that in Spring 1973 more parents than in Fall 1972 perceived that the voucher system would benefit children from lower-income families, children from middle-income families, black children, white-Anglo children, Chicano or Mexican-American children, teachers, school administrators, and parents.

In summary parents have gained a better understanding of the role of choice in the voucher system, have increased their knowledge about vouchers, and have remained satisfied with the schools. At the same time they believe that the school system should offer more programs, which is somewhat contradictory to their belief that teachers and principals are responsive to their suggestions and compliants.

Allocation of Compensatory Voucher Funds

Each mini-school had a discretionary budget comprised of additional voucher dollars which accompanied disadvantaged enrollees. The dollar amount of this budget was determined by the number of students eligible for the compensatory voucher ($238 for K-6 and $302 for 7th and 8th grades,. Students were awarded compensatory vouchers if they were eligible for the free lunch program.

These compensatory voucher budgets were analyzed to determine the type and size of mini-school discretionary expenditures. Teachers, aides, instructional materials (including supplies and consumable materials), equipment, field trips, portable classroom space and professional meetings were the expenditure categories used for analysis.

Averaging the 22 mini-schools by expenditure category revealed about 60% of the money was spent for instructional materials and 16% was spent on aids. Field trips, teachers and equipment accounted for 6, 8, and 9%, respectively.

When the mini-schools were grouped by program instructional orientation, it appeared that programs emphasizing either basic skills or fine arts spent an average of 65% of their discretionary budget for instructional materials. Multi-cultural programs and activity centered programs averaged a 32% expenditure level for instructional materials.

Student and Staff Ethnic Distribution

Despite initial fears, no major shifts in student ethnic balance occurred during the first year of the voucher demonstration. September enrollment for this academic year suggests that this balance will continue. The proportion of each of the three major ethnic groups in Alum Rock (Spanish-surnamed, black, and other) closely paralleled prevoucher proportions. The general ethnic proportions within "mini-schools" also mirrored proportions within schools.

Although there has been a noticeable increase in the proportion of Spanish-surnamed teachers and district staff, this effect is not attributable to the voucher demonstration. Rather, the increase stems from administrative actions and policy decisions initiated several years ago.

Teacher Response

Teachers in voucher and non-voucher schools were given self-administered questionnaires in Fall 1972 and again in Spring 1973. Although detailed analysis of Fall and Spring responses is not yet complete, some preliminary observations follow.

In the Fall, 50% of the teachers felt the voucher demonstration would improve education in the Alum Rock School District. In the Spring, the proportion was quite similar - 51%. However, the differences between teachers in voucher schools and teachers in non-voucher schools were substantial. In the Fall, there was virtually no difference between the response of teachers in voucher schools and teachers in non-voucher schools. By Spring, the differences were quite large. 74% of the teachers in voucher schools felt the demonstration would improve the quality of education in the district whereas only 33% of the teachers in non-voucher schools thought so. Among teachers in the seven schools joining the demonstration in the second year, 56% thought the demonstration would improve the quality of education.

Teachers were asked how they thought the voucher demonstration would improve education. Listed below are the eight responses suggested as answers to the question, "Aside from increased funds, which of the following are the main advantages of the voucher demonstration?" and the proportion of teachers answering "yes."

- Improved teacher teamwork 75%
- Curriculum better suited to student needs 87%
- Student transfer option 66%
- Good learning experience for teachers 84%
- More teacher authority 67%
- Greater opportunity to innovate 96%
- Upgrading of teachers' professional role 57%
- Greater parent involvement 72%

Teacher opportunities for innovation, better curriculum, and teacher learning experiences are the most frequently cited reasons for teacher support. The tendency seems to be to define the advantages of the voucher demonstration from the professional perspective of the teacher. One of the least cited advantages of the demonstration is the transfer option. On the whole, teachers seem to think that parents make either good or fair educational choices for their children, which is consistent with their answers in the Fall and other parts of the Spring questionnaire. They are slightly more likely to think parent involvement is an advantage.

As to the disadvantages of the demonstration, the voucher teachers are most likely to cite "too many meetings" (87%) and least likely to cite "pressure from parents" (15%).

These results are consistent with teachers' responses to a question concerning who has benefitted from the voucher demonstration. The most frequently given responses were students and parents (50%). Teachers seemed to feel that students and parents benefit because teachers have the freedom to serve them better. It is perhaps more informative to note that the biggest difference between voucher teachers and non-voucher teachers is in answer to whether the demonstration benefits students. 83% of the teachers in the voucher schools think the demonstration helps students, compared to only 30% of the teachers in the non-voucher schools.

Two-thirds of the teachers felt that parents should have more to say about what their children learn in schools, and a similar number believed that the voucher system would help achieve this end.

Responses of Principals and Administrators

As a result of the voucher demonstration, the role of the school principal has changed significantly. Principals find they are functioning largely as coordinators and facilitators for their "mini-schools." Prior to the voucher demonstration, principals often made unilateral decisions on behalf of staffs or simply implemented decisions made at the central office. Now their involvement in determining the allocation of school resources has increased dramatically. Principals also are spending more time in meetings with parents. In previous years, a school had one PTA or other parent group, but at present, most "mini-schools" have their own parent groups. Broader participation by teachers in decision-making has increased the time principals must spend in faculty consultation. In addition, voucher principals have been heavily involved in shaping policies which affect the demonstration as a whole, such as student transfers, evaluation, and information dissemination.

Interaction between voucher principals and central office staff has increased due, in part, to administrative and logistical problems arising in the voucher project.

Educational Outcomes

Standardized achievement tests in reading and mathematics are being given to all voucher students as well as to some non-voucher students. Many parents and educators feel that these measures alone are not sufficient to plot a child's educational progress. A battery of experimental tests, measuring other dimensions of education, were administered last Spring. Because educational change is a long-term process, however, there will not be interpretable results for some time. The analysis of the achievement tests is now under way, but preliminary analysis indicates that the introduction of vouchers has not had any deleterious effect on student achievement.

Parent Information

Information has been made available to parents in a variety of ways, including school bulletins, newsletters and other materials sent home from schools, parent meetings and counselling, school board meetings, media coverage, as well as informal personal contacts. Virtually all of the written material has been available in both Spanish and English.

The results of attempts at providing parents with adequate information were mixed. Few parents attended school board meetings at which voucher program information was presented; teachers, principals, and school newsletters have been the most frequent and effective channels of information. Responses to a number of questions on the parent survey indicate a considerable increase in parents' comprehension of the voucher concept and its operational facets during the first year. Because of time limitations and relatively high community mobility, 17% of voucher parents surveyed had not heard of the education voucher demonstration as of November 1973, and 21% did not know the program in which their children were enrolled. By Spring 1973, however, the number of parents who had not heard of vouchers had diminished to 10%.

The proportion of parents who understood that the voucher system allowed them to transfer their children from one school to another during the year increased from roughly one-half to two-thirds. By Spring 1973 approximately four-fifths of the parents realized they could choose the school their child attended, and even a greater number understood they could choose among different programs in different school buildings.

In summary, although it is still too early to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of voucher systems in general, or the specific model being tested in the Alum Rock School District, the prospects are hopeful. The larger issues--increased responsiveness of schools to the needs of those they serve; increased parental satisfaction with and involvement in their children's education; and finally, increased quality of education for all children--can only be assessed as the voucher project progresses in Alum Rock and several additional communities.

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